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THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND WOMEN¹

Esther Mombo

Background

The aim of any form of theological education is to equip people to preach good news effectively, through word and deed. Theological education is crucial for the ministry of the church and it must be contextual and relevant to the realities and needs of the people it is to serve. In some contexts, theological education for ministerial formation has been commercialized such that it is no longer the monopoly of the church to offer it, but it is offered in other settings including secular and universities. And paid for by individual churches. There are still instances where it is organized by the church in an institution that is catered for by the church. Both ways have implications on who has access to theological education and what openings are available for ministry. This has been a subject of many conversations and scholarship, especially in Africa where the church is growing fast, but the training of leaders is not commensurate with the training of the leadership of those churches.

Introduction

In the Global Survey on Theological Education conducted between 2011 and 2013, in preparation for the World Council of Churches Assembly in Busan, several aspects were considered, including curriculum, financial and gender disparities, innovation in different theological schools.² The summary of the findings gave a number of positive results for theological education, especially on the training of men and women. The report indicated that ‘that the number of women students is growing faster than the number of men students—or declining slower than the number of men

¹ Due to the storytelling/narrative character of this chapter, references are used sparingly.

² <http://www.globethics.net/web/gtl/directory>

students'³ it is in this context that the work of Nyambura Njoroge, the subject of this book, is discussed.

To discuss the topic of theological education and women it is important to use Nyambura's own voice discussing her own theological education as captured in this narrative.

'All classes were taught by expatriate staff except African Tradition Religion (ATR) and denominational studies, in my case Presbyterian tradition. In my view, both subjects were treated with less vitality! All lecturers were male. As a result, all our studies lacked rigorous scrutiny of the patriarchal-colonial-missionary-hierarchical theology, beliefs and practices in the churches and theological institutions (most then bible schools and pastoral institutes) in Kenya and Africa, since we had students from other African countries. Despite being located at the heartland of what was once known as "white highlands" with stretches of tea and pyrethrum plantations and the BATA shoe factory not far from the market where I shopped regularly, nothing prepared me for the ministry with people living in extreme poverty and indignity as a result of colonialism and oppressive government machinery in independent Kenya. Nor was I prepared to minister in the urban or the rural-urban cities, towns and slums of Kenya in the 1980s, yet all my six years in the parish were in Nairobi city, mostly what was known as African quarters in colonial Kenya. Never were we taught about violence in the family (extended African family and polygamous marriages) Christian or otherwise, in the manse and in the church hierarchy in all my classes. Especially and in particular, nothing was taught about emotional violence that is experienced by women in church and ecumenical ministry as well as in theological institutions, which are still very male dominated after 30 years of graduating women with theological education, at least in Kenya.⁴

The narrative above describes theological education forty years ago when theological education was organized and sponsored by the Church to train and equip its leaders, mainly for the ordained ministry. The finances for theological education came from organizations in the West, the majority of faculty members were also seconded to teach and paid for by the churches in the West and most curricula reflected a different context, thus dealing with other realities. However, in the past twenty years there has been a remarkable change in most institutions, especially those run by mainline churches in a number of ways. Firstly, there is little or no funding for theological education from donors. The face of faculty in some of

³ Ibid.

⁴ Nyambura Njoroge interviewed by the author, 16/03/2011.

the schools is largely African. Secondly, the purpose of theological education is not confined to ordained ministry, but it inclusive of other ministries and there is a phenomenon of the lay ministries by people who are theologically trained. Thirdly, most of the theological schools have changed to become private chartered universities or are working towards becoming so. As chartered universities, many former theological seminaries in Africa began to struggle with how to produce leaders who could serve in the society that had many challenges.

Twenty years ago, HIV became the hermeneutic through which the theological curriculum in Africa was constructed. HIV brought to light all the issues that the curriculum had failed to deal with forty years ago, with Nyambura's narrative above raising some the major issues. These issues included gender relations, the negative issues of culture, economic disparities and how they impacted men and women differently, violence against women and many more.

From further narratives by Nyambura, one notes how she chose to work with theological educators and students to change the situation in theological education. These excerpts from her speeches bring to light her vision of theological education and much more on the theme of 'that all may live.'

'In my view, the seeds of ecumenical vision begin to grow and germinate when we begin to inquire critically about our calling as people of faith who hunger and thirst for God's reign and presence while taking seriously our social location and reality. How can we be co-workers with Christ in sustaining life in such a violence and death- infested context? Ecumenical vision has to do with our wrestling with God and God's word and the forces of Death that surround us.

Ecumenical theological education refers to a holistic approach to theological education and ministerial formation. One that must take seriously the spiritual, ministerial and ecumenical formation of women and men whose main objective is to work with churches and church related institutions for the purpose of preparing and equipping Christians for the building of the body of Christ and the reign of God on earth (Ephesians 4:11-16).

This means education, which delves into matters of right relationships, economics, food empowerment, justice, peace, truth, love and care for the wellbeing of the whole inhabited world., for these are the things that per occupied Jesus in his mission.

It is education that includes the creation of relevant and contextual theologies and ethical value systems that will empower Christians to overcome

all life–destroying forces which have rendered Africa a continent of senseless violence and untimely deaths.

A holistic approach in theological education inevitably leads to interdisciplinary methodology, for there is no way we can engage in matters related to poverty, for instance, without being in dialogue with economics.

If we have learnt anything from liberation theologies (women’s theologies included) is that the bible talks about economics, which requires us to have the right tools for critical biblical and social analysis. On the other hand, dismantling patriarchy an interplay of sociology, anthropology, psychology, literature, biblical / cultural hermeneutics and theology is necessary.⁵

In her ministry, Nyambura has provided space and opportunity for theological schools in the paradigm-shift. This paradigm shift included a process of engendered theological education for most institutions. The process of engendering theological education was a way of critically evaluating theological education with the view of creating a space for all people to be theologically empowered. Engendering theological education included a revision of the philosophy, theoretical framework and content of the curriculums. It also focused on methodologies and approaches to theological education that were holistic and interdisciplinary.

Through engendering theological education, normative western theological models, African patriarchy and male centered theology were challenged with the view of proposing inclusive, affirming and relevant models for a meaning-full life of faith. Engendering theological education stressed dialogue, openness, grace and willingness to learn and to discern God’s will and truth in every context. This was one way of doing theology differently from how Nyambura experienced it in her own theological formation.

The process of engendering theological education provided space for reviewing old curricula and also preparing for new ones. The phenomenon of integrating contemporary issues such as gender, HIV & AIDS, disability, human rights and others. etc., into the theological curricula was increasingly being adapted. The production of new curricula brought to the centre the gender lenses in the teaching of theology. It demystified the perception that gender issues were a western construct or importation. It is in this regard that the language of mainstreaming gender was adapted in the preparation of the curriculums in some of the institutions. The

⁵ Nyambura Njoroge; ‘The way forward: sustaining the Ecumenical Vision in Eastern Africa in a context of Growing Isolationism.’ Keynote address at the Association of Theological Institutions in Eastern Africa (ATIEA) 40th Anniversary. 07 April 2002.

struggle against HIV & AIDS was recognized and was part and parcel of the teaching of theology. The response to HIV & AIDS pandemic required all people to be theologically, religiously and spiritually sensitized so that they could be motivated to seek life in abundance.

In the beginning, it was hard to prepare and teach units in HIV or to mainstream the study because there was little or no literature on the subject. After a short period of time, literature in the area of HIV grew and continues to grow. This literature was from individuals and groups writing from different perspectives. The writing by women from the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians who in their Third Pan African Conference dedicated their research and writing on HIV & AIDS generated literature that continues to inform the teaching of HIV. Further, the literature by the Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAIA), a project of the World Council of Churches that Nyambura has had the opportunity to head, has continued to inform theological colleges and faculties of theology. Musa Dube, the first Theology Consultant for EHAIA, developed the premise of teaching HIV not as a unit on its own, but one that would cut across the teaching of all theological subjects. The book, *HIV/AIDS and the curriculum: methods of integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological programs* was one of those texts that became a reference book⁶. Written by different scholars from different perspectives, the book provided for ways of mainstreaming HIV so that no student graduated without having to dialogue with the multifaceted issues of HIV. With this new look, theological education moved from abstracts studies to facing the realities of people in the society.

Creating Partners and Alliances

Among the gifts of Nyambura in her ministry and theological education in particular has been creating partnerships and alliances so that all may have ways of working with each other and for the good of all. In an interview, she notes that:

We need to create strong partnerships and alliances that will facilitate an ongoing process of destroying the deep roots of gender-based violence and

⁶ M. W. Dube, *HIV/AIDS and the curriculum: methods of integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological programmes*. Geneva: WCC, 2003.

dismantling all pillars, systems and structures that uphold patriarchy, sexism and all other social injustices in place. The partnerships need to take place at different levels in ways that will enable us to make maximum use of the resources available. Furthermore, we need passionate, committed and bold leadership if indeed we will together facilitate restoration of human dignity and empower children, girls and women who have suffered abuse, violence, humiliating and indignity.⁷

In the narrative above, Nyambura continues her call and plea for wholeness of life by dealing with the issues that bring about death. This she does by calling upon people and institutions to partner because there is strength in unity. The partnerships took various forms and two were directly significant for theological education, namely, first, the Women Deans' meeting and second, the Tamar Campaign.

The Women Deans' meeting

It had been observed that in all denominations the numbers of women doing theology were increasing and even where there was a decrease, the women's numbers were decreasing slowly. This has not just happened, but several things have contributed to the steady increase and the reasons vary from one institution to another and also from one denomination to another. In 2003, the WCC's Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE), organized a meeting for the women deans' meeting in Bossey. The numbers across the continents were; few in some countries and none in other countries. In some countries the women were not deans but served in some capacity in the theological and/or Bible School. The relationships created in this forum continued to impact theological education in various ways, especially mentoring the young women in taking up theological education and leadership in the church and church related institutions. This meeting was participatory dealing with issues that impacted women as leaders in theological institutions. Topics such as different models of leadership, finance, mentoring, networking, survival strategies, research, writing and publishing were covered through presentations and workshops. The sessions of sharing experiences were significant to us women who were isolated from each other and being leaders in spaces that were largely male. The meeting was empowering and affirming to the women leaders in theological education as it contributed to other ways of navigating the

⁷ Nyambura Njoroge interviewed by the author, 16/03/2011.

spaces as pioneners. Out of these meetings friendships and alliances were formed though which many women journeyed the spaces with confidence. In my case I formed friendships that contributed a great deal to the growth and development of younger theologians. My friendship with Dr. Jenny Tepaa then Dean of St. John's College Auckland, was established and we journeyed together in many other forums on theological education especially in the Anglican Communion. Together with other Anglican women theologians we created the Global Anglican Theology Academy (GATA) as 'A Project to Make a Difference by Advocating for and Enabling Women's Leadership in the Anglican Communion'.

Tamar campaign

Don't my brother, do not force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this weekend thing (2 Samuel 13:12)

In 2005, the WCC ETE organized a Tamar campaign workshop at Jumua Conference Centre in Limuru, Kenya. The aim of the workshop was to create space for theological institutions, women in church ministry and the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA) to discuss the topic of gender-based violence, especially sexual and gender-based violence. The Tamar Campaign model is based on the story of Tamar who was raped by her half-brother, Amnon (2 Samuel 13: 1- 22). It was founded by the Ujamaa Centre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Through this conference, the Tamar Campaign was launched in Kenya the same year. it was again another context where networking and alliances were formed in strengthening theological education. The theme of the conference being Gender based violence, the space was ideal for leaders in theological education to find ways of talking about this topic in sacred spaces and empowering students of ministry to be able to name it and seek ways of dealing with the vice. In commemoration of this event, the participants planted trees known at the time of writing as Tamar Trees. Like trees growing to form a shelter, they have become a constant reminder that life should be lived in wholeness.

These are not the only trees associated with Nyambura Njoroge. There are two other sets of trees through which partnerships and collaboration is experienced. In 2014 the Circle St. Paul's University (SPU) Chapter celebrated 30 years of the ordination of women in Kenya. In the ecumenical journey of the ordination of women in Kenya, Nyambura was the first

woman to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church. Lucia Okuthe was the first one to be ordained in the Anglican Church. The occasion which brought women from different parts of Africa, who shared their stories towards ordination and leadership in the church. Speaking at the 2014 celebration, Prof. Mercy Oduyoye observed that;

African women have been active in Christian ministry for more than a quarter of a century. We remember where we have come from, thinking of the roads we have walked, the prayers we have prayed, discerning the hand of God in these journeys, being confident of God's faithfulness and seeking guidance for the roads ahead.

To mark the occasion the women planted trees that is a reminder of the growing ministry of women in the service of God and humanity. Through the efforts of Nyambura and other sisters in the Reformed Church of East Africa, one of the partners of St. Paul's University, ordained their first women in 2018. Among the women who were ordained are those who had done theological education because of engendering theological education. This made it possible for them to be theologically empowered; a theme that Nyambura advocated for and worked for. Some of the grants received were through Nyambura's the efforts.

EHAIA Trees

In 2015 Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy held a meeting at St. Paul's and to mark the end of the meeting, they revisited the Tamar Trees and the Circle Trees. They added a set of trees to mark 15 years of the Tamar Trees because they also discussed issues of HIV and sexual and gender-based violence. In her keynote address, Phumzile Mabizela observed that;

In our attempts to respond to the current challenges of sexual violence, we must remember that the use of sacred texts is an important avenue to be explored. With CBS, we have managed to conscientise the church and service providers on the reality of sexual violence and its consequences.⁸

The different sets of trees are a beautiful sight to behold. As well as their beauty, they tell a particular narrative on the issues that have continued to affect society and how they should be central in teaching space, especially

⁸ These trees were planted during the WCC-EHAIA IRG meeting at the occasion of commemorating 15 years after the planting of the Tamar Trees.

for those who hold leadership positions in the society and are expected to speak out against issues that destroy life. Trees are associated with peace and prosperity, and permanency.

A member of the St. Paul's Circle Chapter

Nyambura is a founder member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians from the 1989 meeting in Accra Ghana, supported the growth of chapters in her efforts to empower and affirm women in theological Education. When the Circle chapter of St. Paul's was inaugurated in 1999, she became one of the members in the Diaspora. She attended Circle chapter meetings when she was in Kenya. In times of joy and pain the Circle chapter identified with her and journeyed with her. One of these times is when she lost her First-born Son Njuguna on 7th November 2008 when the members met and prayed with her and also attended the memorial service of her son.

The chapter sent invitations to her for meetings even when she was not able to attend. She would however send her greetings and a word of affirmation. In one of her letters entitled 'God is faithful,' she wrote:

God is faithful. God's mercy and steadfast love is forever our promise and heritage. Since we have not gathered like this since the death of my beloved son Njuguna on 7th November 2008, I want to take this opportunity to thank each one of you for the support and encouragement that you extended to my family. I am writing this piece because God is faithful, otherwise I do not know how I would have made it this far. I never cease to marvel at how God works in mysterious ways and continuously give us assurance that indeed we are daughters of a loving and caring God.

The path we have chosen to follow has never been an easy one. That is why the reason we need one another as we journey on. We need to listen and seek God's wisdom for one another's needs. We need to be there for one another despite the distance.

Many are the challenges in our path, but we are determined to overcome any onstacles ahead of us. Many of our people live in poverty. Many of our children, sisters and brothers endlessly seek gainful employment. Some of us, may be, are unhappy in our places of work and we wonder if we made the wrong choice in undertaking theological studies. Countless are our needs and wonderings. However, as I always say, God does not eat Ugali or Chapati! God is faithful, God is just.

I believe theology seeks to promote human dignity, justice, peace and fullness of life.

Therefore, I continuously ask myself what am I doing with all the theology I know as a theologically trained woman and as one who is called to serve in the church and the ecumenical movement. When I am called to give account of my faith and my calling, what will I say? What do I say today? My sister, what do you say? How are we giving back to our communities as individuals and as a community of women who have been privileged to study theology?⁹

Her commitment to the SPU Chapter is in word and deed and she is known to be a member in the Diaspora. Because of being committed to the Circle, she has continued to be an inspiration to the young women theologians some of whom chose to study and write about her. Rev. Magdalene Chepkirui wrote her Bachelor's project entitled 'The impact of Theological Education on the ministry of women: A Case of Nyambura Njoroge. She noted how Nyambura had been inspired as a pioneer and how she chose to impact others in the ministry by providing her experience for others to learn about ministry.¹⁰ The many women in the Ministry and in theological academia, who have completed their Master's, PhD's and others who are continuing to study, Nyambura is a household name. The Chapter has experienced God's faithfulness in different ways but in the numbers of women in high level church leadership and others serving in different spaces in the country. It is though the spirit of Nyambura for mentorship and networking that has contributed to this growth.

The Unnamed Graduation Speaker in October 2009

Despite being a significant graduate of SPU, having Nyambura as a Graduation Speaker proved to be a real challenge. Choosing a Graduation Speaker involved students and a committee of the university. Groups would propose names and the university would choose the speaker. Among the names that were proposed by the students, especially the graduating classes, was Dr. Nyambura Njoroge. It took a few nominations before the Council endorsed the name. In October 2009, she was invited as the Graduation Speaker and an official invitation was sent and she accepted. All the preparations went on and on and it was proposed that she planted a tree. This would have been ideal as she was familiar with tree

⁹ Nyambura Njoroge: 'God is faithful, Alumni and Circle Members, /St. Paul's University, Limuru, Kenya 27th August 2010.

¹⁰ Rev. Magdalene Chepkirui Bachelor's dissertation 2013. St. Paul's University Library.

planting sessions at SPU. In 2005 she had been part of the group that had planted the Tamar Trees, as noted above. The tree planting ceremony was turned down at the last minute, even though the Administration had prepared the trees. The reasons for this action were not clearly stated but they included the fact that the speaker of the previous graduation had not planted a tree and he was also an alumni of SPU. According to this argument, it would be awkward for the University to have Nyambura plant a tree. While this may not be convincing, there were complexities with her as the Speaker at this particular graduation ceremony and further research may reveal the deep patriarchal complexities of the context.

The graduation ceremony went on as planned and within the ceremony, Nyambura gave her talk. The norm is that the speaker is introduced by the Chair, the Chancellor of the University. For Nyambura, no one introduced her to speak. The Master of Ceremony who was a faculty member announced that it was time for the Speaker and Nyambura stood to speak. Nyambura went to the podium and introduced herself then gave her speech on the topic, *‘Christian Leaders of Integrity: Who Can Find?’* She based her talk on the story of King David, Bathsheba and Prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 11 & 12).

As Christians, as baptized people of God, we are not expected to be preoccupied with self-preservation, ME, ME, ME. Rather, we are expected to uphold the values that are life-giving in the community and that bring glory to God. Our eyes, ears, minds and hearts must be focused on the “least of these”. We are sent to minister to the citizens of this continent — the majority who happen to be children and young people under the age of 18 years old and among them millions of orphans, citizens who happen to be among the poorest in the world, millions are HIV positive and others are sick with TB, Malaria and others are dying from preventable, manageable and/or treatable diseases while others are malnourished beyond rescue. Our different kinds of professions and ministries, including the training ministry at St. Paul’s, must give priority to the “least of these” if we are to press forward with boldness and integrity.

As Christian leaders of integrity we must ensure that their potentials are developed to the full, their dignity restored, their humanity and life protected and the image and likeness of God (as female and male) is affirmed and celebrated. In other words, we must not play politics with people’s lives, we must speak the TRUTH, stand for the TRUTH, witness for the TRUTH and we must strive to be on God’s side and the ‘least of these’.¹¹

¹¹ Nyambura Njoroge: Graduation Speech October 2009, SPU.

The graduation speech was delivered with such eloquence, passion and courage. She spoke with a conviction and an understanding of the context. She used scripture to back up her arguments and to challenge the graduands and those present. The graduands were delighted with the speech and gave very positive comments. This was the same with the community at large. The mystery of her not being introduced was raised and no reason was given, other than it was an oversight. The omission was so glaring that one would wish to look into further reasons for this omission.

As an ethicist, she raised issues of integrity in leadership; a theme that she has held in the other talks, as well for those who are serving in leadership. Like some theological papers she has presented, and others quoted extensively in this essay, the theological themes of the dignity of life remain key. The affirmation of life in all its forms has remained central. In the graduation speech she offered a challenge to the leaders present in the ceremony and those who were moving into leadership to be leaders of integrity. This meant being bold to challenge the issues that destroyed life of the people they were leading.

How come the theme of leadership is one she chooses to talk about?³ In a paper entitled, 'Faithful and fruitful leadership,' she locates leadership in her family narrative.

In my professional ecumenical journey, I find myself deeply focused on the theme of leadership. This year is particularly exceptional as I celebrate 25 years of my ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament on 5th September 2007. The topic of leadership seems to captivate me for reasons not well known to me. Probably because I grew up in a home of two church and community leaders who were critically aware of their Christian vocation. As I rewind my childhood tape, I have fond memories of my parents (now among the living-dead) faithful and fruitful leadership. This is not to say that my parents did not have weaknesses and/or make serious mistakes in their lives. But as I struggle to understand my Christian vocation, I find myself drawn back to their ministry and words of wisdom.¹²

In this paper and others, she discusses leadership in the context of African realities that destroy life, and the church or theological institutions are not spared either:

Unfortunately, this includes theological institutions and programmes that are meant to educate and mentor faithful and fruitful leaders. We have women and men in the church leadership who plot mischief, do not reject

¹² N. Njoroge, 'Faithful and fruitful Leadership,' Unpublished paper, 2007.

evil and do not fear God therefore we should not pretend that bad and weak leadership only exists in the political and economic arena. We must not shy away from the bitter truth that churches in Africa face leadership crisis. Most importantly, we must name, honour and emulate those who demonstrate faithfulness and fruitfulness, however few they maybe. Not for the sake of putting them on a pedestal but for the sake of affirming the power in the human spirit that is radiated in their convictions and life-giving actions. These are women and men of all ages and in different walks of life who are the bearers of hope, courage and vision in a very challenging context.¹³

In the context of bad leadership as a challenge for the church, Nyambura indicates that “The church is a grassroots institution usually well-structured at different levels in both rural and urban settings. Therefore, it is not an impossible task to identify women and men who have stood for truth, justice, peace and fullness of life. We are searching for people with a human spirit that is committed to fighting injustice, devaluation and dehumanization.” Africa is in urgent need of models of leadership styles that will help the church to break the chains of conspiracy, secrecy, silence and complacency when evil deeds subvert God’s mission of making all things new. The discussions on leadership and themes that destroy life were true in the time that she wrote as they are true today in the church and society at large.

Theological Education

Anytime I contemplate making a move or major decision in my life and especially in the ministry, I literally wrestle with God. I suppose I am not alone in this. I am sharing my story to say, I believe it is always good to look back and identify what kind of spiritual footstools we are standing on.

Reflecting on her journey in ministry and how her parents were instrumental, Nyambura talks about wrestling with God. Indeed, she has not only wrestled with God but with contextual realities that affect the people of God. From Nyambura’s voice through the writings, one locates her passion for theological education. For her, theological education is relevant if it is open to all people in society, a programme that is strong in mentorship and addresses contextual realities of life.

¹³ Ibid.

Nyambura's work on theological education spans from curriculum development to faculty development. A curriculum of theological education had to be inclusive of all issues in society. As the Programme Executive of Ecumenical Theological Education at the World Council of Churches, she maintained that the young especially women were supported to start and complete their studies. Across the world there will be testimonies of women and men who were supported to complete their theological studies. Women who have completed their PhD's and are in the faculties of theological education in recent past were among the many who were supported through different financial support programmes.¹⁴ The intentionality to mentor and to give voice to those whose voices were muted were brought back to the centre in Ecumenical Theological Education. Mentorship in theological education was to provide space for the learners to gain skills for ministry and to mentor others.

As well as the support for different individuals, Nyambura led the way in the development of a new curriculum for theological education, which had to be revised and renewed to empower leaders for prophetic ministry within the church. Due to Nyambura's keen interest in contextual realities, issues such as conflict resolution or transformation and peace-building, political and economic transformation, human rights and democratization and interfaith dialogue were included in some of the curricula for theological institution. The inclusion the broad spectrum of courses into the theological curricula would help to equip contemporary church leaders with the necessary skills for managing the day-to-day issues of the modern church and society.

The real and profound curricular changes were the inclusion of HIV & AIDS, gender and disability studies in the curriculum. These were not stand-alone issues, but they were interconnected. They became the lens through which theological education and the church was perceived. Theological Education that was inclusive of these issues prepared leaders who challenged the issues that were life threatening. Working as Programme Executive of the Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy, a programme of the World Council of Churches, Nyambura continued to work with theological educators on the issues of HIV and Gender. While people

¹⁴ In Kenya, for example Dr. Dorcas Nodoro, Dr. Regina Kinuthia, Dr. Catherine Mwihiya, Dr. Lydia Mwaniki, Dr. Dr. Irne Ayalo, Dr. Dorcas Chebet, Dr. Mary Tororeiy, Dr. Catherine Njagi, Dr. Vella Ngaina, Dr. Cicily Mbura. This "cloud of witnesses" multiplies when one undertakes a similar analysis throughout the continent.

were living longer now with the availability of anti-retroviral therapy, there are other challenges of HIV that are life threatening. For instance, there was now the challenge of faith healing that led some people to give up on their medication. This was a challenge that the theology curriculum now has had to deal with. There has been progress among churches on Gender and Disability issues, but more remains to be achieved. Changes in theological education curriculum is not a one off, but constant review is required as there are many emerging issues in all aspects of society. For example, with the COVID-19 global pandemic and crisis as experienced in 2020, the need to prepare religious leaders to respond to emergencies and disasters has become acute.

Conclusion

In this paper we have seen the voice of Nyambura when articulating her passion for life affirming issues. Her writings bring to light the challenges that she has wrestled with in her professional life. They also highlight opportunities and challenges that her life journey posed to her. She has indeed remained firm in her conviction that all must have life, and have it in abundance (John 10:10).